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**United States Senate  
Committee on Foreign Relations**

**Hearing on Chechnya  
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**“Humanitarian Activities in the North Caucasus”**

**by**

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Introduction

UNHCR works with a number of UN and voluntary agencies (OCHA, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, UNFPA, IOM, DRC, ACF, NRC, MSF, Salvation Army, Islamic Relief, World Vision, CARE) to provide assistance and protection to Chechens outside Chechnya, mainly in Ingushetia (200,000), but also in Dagestan (12,000) and Georgia (5,000). Seventy per cent of these displaced persons and refugees are in host families, while 20% are spontaneously settled and only 10% in camps set up by the international community. Around 100,000 of those displaced have returned to Chechnya, though many are shuttling back and forth. At this time, about twice as many people are leaving than those returning each week, but only a quarter of those going back appear to be remaining in Chechnya.

Assistance

Emergency needs are being met outside Chechnya, but there are sectoral and locational gaps. Our movements are escorted, for security reasons and at our own insistence, by Russian security forces. Since mid-September, UNHCR has delivered 5,000 tons of aid worth \$4 million on 42 convoys to the North Caucasus, including 34 to Ingushetia, five to Dagestan, one to North Ossetia, one to Karachaevo-Cherkessia, and one yesterday, 29 February, to Grozny. Yesterday's 10 truck convoy, provided and escorted by our Russian implementing partner, Emercom, arrived in the center of Grozny at midday and offloaded for distribution today through local hospitals, soup kitchens and bakeries. Three UNHCR local staff accompanied the convoy and will

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monitor the distribution of the 45 metric tons of food (flour, millet, peas, sugar, barley), as well as 900 pieces of plastic sheeting, 20,000 bars of soap, 230 mattresses and 1300 blankets.

The convoy is something of a pilot project to allow us to evaluate security and logistic possibilities for a future aid operation. We also hope to get a better idea of how many civilians remain in Grozny, estimated now at between 10-20,000. Some of this information should be available later today, at which time we shall share our updated news.

#### Protection concerns

Our immediate protection concerns come from accounts from displaced persons who report widespread displacement from villages in the Argun Valley, the site of continuing military activities. Some reports say thousands of villagers are fleeing in advance of the military offensive as it moves southward. Accounts describe direct shelling of some villages (Shatoy and Bolshie) and intense fighting around others (Itum-Kali). (See attached maps.)

According to the Ingush Migration Service, some 1,800 new internally displaced people arrived in Ingushetia last week from Chechnya and 763 returned for good. Many of the new arrivals are women and children from some of the most heavily destroyed locations in Chechnya, including Katar-Yurt and Khikhichu. Many say they would like to return home, but are afraid to do so because of lawlessness and reports that all males are being temporarily detained for identification purposes. IDPs told UNHCR monitors that in the Argun district, all males aged 15 and older are detained by the local police (the Ministry of Interior Affairs) for purposes of establishing their identity. The IDPs said some of these men remain in detention.

Additional protection concerns outside Chechnya are the lack of legal status and necessary documentation for IDPs to access state-provided assistance and to be able to move about freely; and the continuing fear that in some instances, IDPs are being forced to return to Chechnya against their will. "Persuasion" to leave Ingushetia is accomplished sometimes by refusal to register new arrivals (particularly from the Russian-controlled areas of Chechnya) for assistance, by de-registering them, or by cutting the levels of assistance provided to them. (We also are monitoring the situation of around 150,000 IDPs from Chechnya -- the majority of whom are non-ethnic Chechens -- displaced to non-contiguous provinces, since, although "recognized," they

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are mostly unable to register and therefore have consequent difficulties such as entering their children in school.)

Reports by human rights organizations and from journalists about atrocities and gross human rights violations in Chechnya — both in the detention camps set up by Russian troops and in the towns to which Chechens have tried to return -- appear to be corroborated at least in part by many of the daily interviews carried out by UNHCR monitors. We are putting some mechanisms in place to check out the reports more systematically. An officer devoted entirely to protection issues was sent to the area last week. UNHCR, as in similar conflict situations, has certain reporting constraints, in order to preserve its impartial presence and protect the IDPs, staff and the assistance program itself. We deal with this by sharing verified reports with those agencies whose mandated task it is to monitor human rights conditions.

The appointment of Mr. Kalamanov, the former head of the Federal Migration Service, to investigate alleged human rights abuses in Chechnya, and the opening of a passport service in Chechnya (none having been available for the past four years) has given rise to some hope that the situation may begin to improve shortly.

#### Future of the operation

Following an inter-agency assessment mission to Ingushetia (and just inside northern, Russian-controlled Chechnya) in the first week of February (which found conditions in the established camps reasonable, but much below standard in the spontaneous settlements and only slightly better in the host families), an appeal for funds should be issued today, covering the period through 30 June. Continuing emphasis will be placed on water and sanitation, with the intention to upgrade and rehabilitate a failing Ingushetia infrastructure. Much more emphasis will be placed on shelter, with the main aim being to repair and improve the host family living compounds (sheds, garages, etc. offered as shelter). In addition, some food assistance will be required for host families. For the first inter-agency flash appeal of \$16.2m, a total of \$14.1m has been pledged.

Particularly since the fall of Grozny and the Russian claim to control the major part of Chechnya, questions have been asked about our intention to function inside Chechnya. Our opinion is that the situation does not appear to be safe for the majority of Chechens and we would therefore not encourage return at this stage. The recent human rights reports make us even more cautious. A second concern is that we cannot

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mount any assistance operation of significant scale, since we cannot send international staff into Chechnya, even on mission, to ensure proper control of the implementation of such an operation—due to the omnipresent and undiminished security risks, not only as a result of the war, but also from criminals.

For the time being, UNHCR and its partners are setting up a system to provide assistance in Ingushetia for those who elect to return, and we have developed plans to run convoys across the provincial borders into Chechnya, depending on the feedback in the coming days from yesterday's first convoy.

The U.N. Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs is also planning to send a mission to Moscow this week to enter into discussions about setting up a possible assistance operation in Chechnya.

I thank you for your attention.